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Navajo President Shelly Writes GMCS School Closures Violates Laws

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly sent a letter to the New Mexico education secretary stating the Gallup McKinley County School board violated state and federal laws when they approved a budget that would close three reservation schools.

The letter was dated June 28.

The letter outlines eight different alleges that GMCS board violated the Public School Finance Act, the Indian Education Act, New Mexico Open Meetings Act, Individuals with Disabilities Act, Rehabilitation Act and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

“These significant violations of state and federal law make it impossible to approve the proposed operating budget,” President Shelly wrote.

GMCS Board voted in May to close middle schools in Crownpoint, Tohatchi and Navajo. The board cited budget constraints forced the closure of the schools.

Parents and community members have voiced opposition to the closures stating that the school board didn’t involve the community or parents in the decision process.

In addition, a school closure form that was sent to Sec. Skandera from GMCS Board indicated that the Navajo Nation was consulted regarding the school closures.

During a Monday night meeting with community members, Presidential, Department of Diné Education, and Legislative staff members, they all denied that any official consultation had taken place regarding decision of the school closures.

“There is much to be done to remediate the situation and allow for you to consider community input and consideration of other options to address the speculative shortfall for the next fiscal year,” President Shelly wrote.

President Shelly added the possible closure of the schools could cost the school district federal money.

In a meeting last month, Sec. Skandera told President Shelly that she has to approve any closure of public schools in New Mexico.

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